DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 254 080 FL 014 877

AUTHOR Johnstone, Tamara S.
TITLE The Rediscovery of Education in America: An Assessment of National Commission and Task Force Reports.
INSTITUTION Joint National Committee for Languages, Washington, DC.
PUB DATE Nov 84
NOTE 13p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (Chicago, IL, November 16-18, 1984).
PUB TYPE Information Analyses (070) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Educational Assessment; *Educational Needs; *Educational Quality; Elementary Secondary Education; Literature Reviews; *National Surveys; *Second Language Instruction; *State of the Art Reviews
IDENTIFIERS Academic Preparation for College (CEEB); Action for Excellence; Americas Competitive Challenge; Beyond Growth Next Stage Lang and Area Studies; Critical Needs in International Education; *Excellence in Education; High School A Report on Secondary Educ in America; Making the Grade; Nation at Risk (A); Nation Responds (A); Signs of Trouble and Erosion A Report on Grad Educ

ABSTRACT

The national task force and commission reports on the status of education in the United States released in 1983 and 1984 that have the most relevance for foreign language studies are reviewed. These include: (1) "A Nation At Risk" by the National Commission on Excellence in Education, the College Board's "Academic Preparation for College: What Students Need to Know and Be Able to Do," "Making the Grade" by the Twentieth Century Fund's Task Force, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching's "High School: A Report on Secondary Education in America," the report of the National Commission on Student Financial Assistance entitled "Signs of Trouble and Erosion: A Report on Graduate Education," the Business-Higher Education Forum's "America's Competitive Challenge--The Need for a National Response", "Action for Excellence" by the Task Force on Education for Economic Growth, the Department of Education's "A Nation Responds: Recent Efforts to Improve Education," "Critical Needs in International Education: Recommendations for Action" by the National Advisory Board on International Education Programs, and "Beyond Growth: The Next Stage in Language and Area Studies" by the Association of American Universities. The foreign language-related statements and recommendations of the reports are discussed, and source information for each is provided. (MSE)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Tamara Johnstone

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

ED254080

FL014877

ACTFL - November, 1984

THE REDISCOVERY OF EDUCATION IN AMERICA: AN ASSESSMENT OF NATIONAL COMMISSION AND TASK FORCE REPORTS

By
Tamara S. Johnstone
Assistant Director, Joint National Committee for Languages

Good morning. It is certainly a pleasure to be here, and it is especially a pleasure since we are going to be reporting on some very positive initiatives regarding language study.

I must begin by saying that - nationally, the stage has been set for improved language study and facilities by close to two dozen national commission and taskforce reports. As one study, released by the Department of Education this past May, declares, "Education has vaulted to the forefront of the national agenda, and the public acceptance of these reports is compelling evidence of their impact."

As Ms. Hoffman mentioned, we at the JNCL office recently completed a summary of all the major national education commission reports that have been released during the past two years. Today, I would like to discuss those reports which, from our perspective, are really most significant to our concerns.

Some of these reports you are probably familiar with, particularly A Nation At Risk, which is the report of the National Commission on Excellence in Education. That report begins by stating that "The educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a nation and a people." It was also this

commission, appointed by Secretary of Education Terrell Bell, that concluded that we have "been committing an act or unthinking, unilateral, educational disarmament." The Twentieth Century Fund's Task Force on Federal Elementary and Secondary Education Policy states it a bit more simply. - They say - "Our nation's public schools are in trouble." The College Board explains it a bit more positively. - They say - "We will be well-served if educational excellence can be made possible... For all students." And the Carnegie Foundation declares that "Today's ... Curriculum barely reflects the global view."

Now, of these reports, A Nation At Risk recommends a number of general educational reforms including strengthening high school graduation requirements, lengthening the school day or year, and raising college and university admission requirements. However, they do, among other subjects, specifically mention foreign languages. The commission strongly recommends that college-bound students take at least two years of a foreign language in high school. They also insist that since proficiency in a foreign language usually requires four to six years of study, such study should begin at the elementary school level. With regard to teachers, they state and I quote, "Despite widespread publicity about an overpopulation of teachers, severe shortages exist: In the fields of mathematics, science and foreign languages."

The College Board study, entitled Academic Preparation For College: What Students Need To Know And Be Able To Do, describes foreign languages as one of the "Basic Academic Subjects" that

high school students should be taking. It states that "college entrants need a background in another language to engage in advanced study in such fields as languages, literature and history," and that "knowledge of a foreign language helps students prepare for careers in commerce, international relations, law, science and the arts."

The Twentieth Century Fund's Task Force is very strong in declaring that "Every American public school student should have the opportunity to acquire proficiency in a second language." Their report, entitled Making The Grade, argues that language skills have become a necessity because of our increased involvement in competitive trade and investment with the rest of the world, and they, like the College Board, link language learning to future jobs. This task force calls upon the federal government to sponsor a second-language policy by helping to train enough foreign language teachers and by encouraging and assisting second-language programs, with the responsibility for actual implementation in the hands of state and local governments.

The Carnegie Foundation takes the most global view of these national studies. Their report, entitled High School: A Report On Secondary Education In America, declares that "All students should not only 'learn about' a foreign language but be proficient in its use." And they make several recommendations for achieving this goal. First, second language study "should begin long before students come to high school." They insist that "While there is no right time to learn a language, research, experience,

and common sense suggest that language study should begin early--by the fourth grade and preferably before-- and it should be sustained." Second, the methods for teaching foreign languages should be improved, including the arrangement of larger blocks of time for such study. Lastly, "Students need continuity in language study as they move from one school to another. Since it is not possible for every school to offer every language at every level, some nationwide priorities must be set."

Another important national study is the Report of the National Commission on Student Financial Assistance, which was created under a public law to provide Congress and the President with information on, and policy recommendations for, federal assistance to graduate students. The commission's report, which is entitled Signs of Trouble and Erosion: A Report on Graduate Education in America, proposes several recommendations, primarily directed to the federal government, for improving our nation's graduate programs. Recommendations of importance to the language and international studies community include increased federal support "for research, instruction, and graduate study in a wide range of languages and cultures," and "for faculty and teachers to study in foreign countries." They specifically recommend increased funding for Title VI of the Higher Education Act and for Fulbright-Hays. Furthermore, they recommend the expansion of the National Graduate Fellowship Program "and other appropriate authorities" to include approximately 750 additional fellowships annually "for the support of graduate students in the arts, humanities,

and social sciences."

Three other reports which I would like to just briefly mention are the reports from the National Institute of Education's Study Group on the Conditions of Excellence in American Higher Education, the Business-Higher Education Forum, and the Task Force on Education for Economic Growth.

The Report of NIE's Study Group was just released three weeks ago, and it focuses on ways to improve the quality of undergraduate programs. It describes both the achievements and problems of our nation's undergraduate programs and then makes 27 recommendations for improving student learning. These recommendations can be grouped into three general categories, namely the need for greater student involvement, higher expectations, and assessment and feedback. I'm mentioning this report only briefly simply because it is much more general than the others in that it does not mention specific subjects that students should be taking.

<u>America's Competitive Challenge - The Need For A National Response</u> is the Report of the Business-Higher Education Forum, and it is important because it makes the business connection. The report discusses our nation's need to compete effectively in the global marketplace. It urges, among other things, that the President take the initial steps in fostering a public awareness and consensus that "industrial competitiveness is crucial to our social and economic well-being." So, the prevailing mood of this report is important to our concerns, however, there

is only one brief mention of foreign languages and that is in regard to initiatives that universities should be undertaking. They insist that universities should increase their emphasis on teaching and research in areas such as "expanded study programs and curriculum requirements in the fields of foreign language, culture and sociopolitical institutions."

Action For Excellence is the Report of the Task Force on Education for Economic Growth and is important because it has been adopted by the National Governor's Association. The report specifically outlines a plan to improve our country's educational system; each "action" recommendation is followed by measures that groups, such as educators, government officials, and businessmen, can take to improve education. The report recommends improving the curriculum for grades k-12, and strengthening college entrance requirements and suggests that business leaders actively work "to establish partnerships between businesses and schools." The task force calls upon each governor, in collaboration with "the state's legislators, state and local boards of education, educators, business leaders and others" to develop a plan to improve education and to appoint a Task Force on Education for Economic Growth. So, the report is valuable for our concerns in that it calls attention to the need for educational improvement and demands that national leadership address our educational problems.

I would like to discuss one other report, which was released this past May, by the Department of Education, as sort-of a

follow-up to the National Commission on Excellence in Education and some of these other reports. It is entitled A Nation Responds: Recent Efforts To Improve Education. This report presents a general overview of national developments in education and includes a state-by-state profile of educational developments during the past year as well as a chart summarizing these state activities.

With regard to the states, the report notes that "Forty-eight [states] are considering new high school graduation requirements, thirty-five have approved changes"; "twenty-one report initiatives to improve textbooks and instructional materials"; and "twenty-four are examining master teacher or career ladder programs, and six have begun statewide or pilot programs." The final section of the report provides a sample of recent efforts "by local schools, districts, postsecondary institutions, associations, and the private sector." Although this report is concerned with all recent educational developments, it does, where appropriate, address such specific issues as language requirements and proficiency standards.

Finally - the two reports that JNCL feels merit considerable attention are the Report of the National Advisory Board on International Education Programs, which is called Critical Needs In International Education: Recommendations For Action, and the Report of the Association of American Universities which is entitled Beyond Growth: The Next Stage In Language And Area Studies.

The National Advisory Board was commissioned by the Secretary

of Education in September of 1983 specifically to put forward recommendations for improving foreign language and international studies programs. Their report, which was released in December of 1983, puts forth 19 specific recommendations. They recommend that local school districts provide every opportunity for students to learn a foreign language, at the earliest years possible. Also, that colleges and universities establish foreign language requirements, based on demonstrated proficiency, for both admission and graduation. They say, and I quote, that "Such proficiency should be based on national standards currently being developed by the profession, and should measure at various levels the ability of the student to speak, understand, read, and write the language."

Other recommendations include the development of advanced curricula and materials for language teaching, and creation of a new federal program to strengthen the skills of teachers and other professionals in foreign languages and international studies. Furthermore, they recommend increased federal support for Title VI, international education, of the Higher Education Act and the Fulbright-Hays program, and creation of a National Fund for International Education.

This last suggestion, of a National Fund or Foundation for International Education, also appears in the Report of the Association of American Universities. The AAU study was conducted for the Department of Defense, and it focuses on the current capacities of U.S. universities for advanced training and research

in foreign language and area studies. The report also makes some very important recommendations for strengthening these programs including more extensive funding of the overseas advanced language training centers and expansion of Part b, of Title VI, "to include basic research relevant to the general policy interests of American business abroad." They also call for the establishment of "a set of special language instruction resource centers to stimulate and coordinate innovative work in language teaching" and expansion of support for advanced language training in the country where the language is spoken.

In conclusion, the last few years has seen a great deal of rhetoric concerning education in the United States. These studies, task force reports, commission assessments, and their recommendations have already produced some policies. It is likely that they will be the basis for future policy consideration. That is why JNCL has produced a policy statement and is now drafting a set of recommendations and action steps for the profession.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

A NATION AT RISK: THE IMPERATIVE FOR EDUCATIONAL REFORM

The National Commission on Excellence in Education

U.S. Government Printing Office
Washington, D.C. 20402

Report #: 065-000-00177 Price: $4.50

MAKING THE GRADE

The Twentieth Century Fund - Task Force on Federal Elementary and Secondary Education Policy

The Twentieth Century Fund
41 East 70th Street
New York, NY 10021 Price: $6.00

ACADEMIC PREPARATION FOR COLLEGE: WHAT STUDENTS NEED TO KNOW AND BE ABLE TO DO

The College Board

The College Board
888 Seventh Avenue
New York, NY 10019

HIGH SCHOOL: A REPORT ON SECONDARY EDUCATION IN AMERICA

The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching

Harper & Row Publishers, Inc.
10 East 53rd Street
New York, NY 10022 Price: $16.00

AMERICA'S COMPETITIVE CHALLENGE - THE NEED FOR A NATIONAL RESPONSE

The Business-Higher Education Forum

The Business-Higher Education Forum
One Dupont Circle
Suite 800
Washington, D.C. 20036 Price: $17.50 (plus $2.50 for postage)

ACTION FOR EXCELLENCE

The Task Force on Education for Economic Growth

The Distribution Center
Education Commission of the States
1860 Lincoln, #300
Denver, CO 80295 Price: $5.00

SIGNS OF TROUBLE AND EROSION: A REPORT ON GRADUATE EDUCATION IN AMERICA

National Commission on Student Financial Assistance

Graduate Education Report
Office of External Affairs
New York University
25 West 4th Street, Room 506
New York, NY 10012

CRITICAL NEEDS IN INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

National Advisory Board on International Education Programs

Center for International Education
Office of Postsecondary Education
400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20202

BEYOND GROWTH: THE NEXT STAGE IN LANGUAGE AND AREA STUDIES

Association of American Universities

The Association of American Universities
One Dupont Circle
Suite 730
Washington, D.C. 20036

THE NATION RESPONDS: RECENT EFFORTS TO IMPROVE EDUCATION

Department of Education

Superintendent of Documents
U.S. Government Printing Office
Washington, D.C. 20402 Price: $7.50

INVOLVEMENT IN LEARNING: REALIZING THE POTENTIAL OF AMERICAN HIGHER EDUCATION

National Institute of Education - Study Group on the Conditions of Excellence in American Higher Education

Superintendent of Documents
U.S. Government Printing Office
Washington, D.C. 20402

Stock #: 065-000-00213-2 Price: $4.50